

Message Text

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PAGE 01 AMMAN 03929 01 OF 03 141605Z

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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4827

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 AMMAN 3929

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, SY, JO, IS, PLO, XF

SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER RIFAI: ASAD VISIT

1. SUMMARY. RIFAI SAID ASAD'S VISIT WAS SUCCESSFUL AND THAT ASAD HAD BEEN FRANK AND OPEN WITH JORDANIANS. NO JOINT MILITARY COMMAND RESULTED AND THERE WAS REMARKABLY LITTLE SYRIAN PRESSURE FOR ONE. JORDAN'S MILITARY COOPERATION WITH SYRIA EXTENDS ONLY TO JOINT PLANNING IN THE EVENT THAT BOTH ARE ENGAGED IN HOSTILITIES. JORDAN WILL CONTINUE TO KEEP ITS FRONT WITH ISRAEL QUIET AND WILL AVOID AUTOMATICALLY GETTING INVOLVED IN ANY FUTURE CONFLICT HOWEVER IT MIGHT DEVELOP. RIFAI REVIEWED FOR ME SYRIAN VIEWS ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAQ (BAD AND NOT GETTING ANY BETTER), WITH THE PLO (GOOD AND SUPPORTIVE, BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF JORDAN'S INTERESTS), AND LEBANON (SYRIA SUPPORTS FRANGIE, WANTS STABILITY, AND IS DEEPLY IRRITATED BY IRAQI AND LIBYAN MEDDLING). JORDAN IS PARTICIPATING IN NEW JOINT COMMISSION WITH SYRIA WHICH IS EVOLUTIONARY STEP IN IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES. SOME ECONOMIC COORDINATION RESULTED FROM THE VISIT INCLUDING SYRIAN APPROVAL OF YARMOUK WATER PROJECTS. END SUMMARY.

2. AT RIFAI'S REQUEST I SAW HIM MORNING JUNE 14. HE WAS FOLLOWING UP WITH ME ON ANOTHER MATTER, BUT WE

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PAGE 02 AMMAN 03929 01 OF 03 141605Z

TALKED EXTENSIVELY ABOUT THE RESULTS OF THE ASAD VISIT.

3. ON THE QUESTION OF MILITARY COORDINATION, RIFAI INSISTED THAT ASAD HAD BEEN VERY COOPERATIVE. THE QUESTION OF A JOINT COMMAND HAD ONLY ARISEN ONCE DURING THE CONVERSATIONS. ASAD AT THAT TIME WAS TALKING OF AN EXPECTED IRAQ-IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA INITIATIVE TO FORM A JOINT DEFENSE PACT IN THE GULF AREA TO INCLUDE THE SMALLER STATES AS WELL. ASAD CLAIMED THIS WAS AN IRAQI INITIATIVE AND WHY DIDN'T JORDAN AND SYRIA ANNOUNCE A JOINT COMMAND OF THEIR OWN? ASAD WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE IRAQI PROPOSAL FOR THE GULF INCLUDED THE EMPLOYMENT OF MILITARY AID FROM OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE EVENT OF INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES. ASAD SAW THIS AS A CONTINUATION OF AN IRAQI EFFORT TO UNDERMINE SMALLER STATES BY STIRRING UP TROUBLE AND THEN INTERVENING UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE JOINT DEFENSE ARRANGEMENT. CERTAINLY IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA WOULD NOT HAVE INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS ASAD CONCLUDED WOULD ALSO BE ORIENTED TOWARD SYRIA AND THEREFORE A SYRIAN AND JORDANIAN AGREEMENT WOULD BE A HELPFUL COUNTERWEIGHT AND A SUPPORT FOR THE SMALLER STATES IN THE GULF.

4. RIFAI SAYS HE COUNTERED BY POINTING OUT THAT JORDAN WAS IN THE MIDST OF INTRICATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND THE US TO FINANCE \$500M WORTH OF AIR DEFENSE EQUIPMENT. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUCH A COMMAND NOW WOULD NECESSITATE A COMPLETE REORIENTATION AND COULD ONLY RESULT IN UPSETTING THESE NEGOTIATIONS. RIFAI ADDED HE INSISTED THAT ASAD INDICATE AGAINST WHOM THE COMMAND WOULD BE DIRECTED. ASAD WAS VERY VAGUE AND RIFAI SAID THE MATTER WAS DROPPED.

5. I PURSUED THIS SUBJECT FURTHER WITH RIFAI. (EVENING BEFORE NEWSWEEK DE BORCHGRAVE HAD TOLD ME THAT LAST WEEK BEFORE ASAD VISIT HE HAD TALKED ABOUT VISIT WITH KING. AT THAT TIME KING HAD INDICATED THAT SYRIAN AIR DEFENSE IN SOUTH SYRIA WAS COORDINATED TO COVER NORTH JORDAN. IN ADDITION,

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PAGE 03 AMMAN 03929 01 OF 03 141605Z

KING SAID HE EXPECTED TO BE PRESSED HEAVILY BY SYRIANS FOR A COMMITMENT TO A JOINT COMMAND AND THAT JORDAN WOULD ALSO HAVE TO CONTEND WITH SYRIAN PRESSURE TO BE AUTOMATICALLY INVOLVED IN A WAR SHOULD ONE BREAK OUT AGAINST THE ISRAELIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ON FRIDAY JUNE 14 AT LUNCH KING HAD BEEN MUCH MORE RETICENT IN TALKING WITH DE BORCHGRAVE ABOUT THESE ISSUES AND DE BORCHGRAVE HAD THE IMPRESSION THE

KING FEARED HE WOULD PUBLISH THIS INFORMATION AND
WAS THEREFORE BACKING AWAY FROM DISCUSSION.

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PAGE 01 AMMAN 03929 02 OF 03 141605Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4828

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 AMMAN 3929

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

6. RIFAI SAID THAT MILITARY COORDINATION WITH SYRIA
HAD BEEN HAPHAZARD AND DISJOINTED. HE INSISTED THAT
IT WAS ONLY ORIENTED TOWARD A DEFENSE
AGAINST AN ISRAELI ATTACK. SYRIA HAD GIVEN ABSOLUTELY
NO INDICATION THAT IT WANTED WAR, QUITE TO THE CONTRARY
THEY SEEMED TO BE LOOKING TO THE US TO PRODUCE ANOTHER
STEP ON THE GOLAN. AS A RESULT, WHAT THEY ARE NOW EMBARKING
UPON ARE GENERAL DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW THE
SYRIAN FIFTH ARMORED DIVISION WHICH IS STATIONED NORTH
OF THE JORDANIAN BORDER COULD HELP AND SUPPORT THE JORDANIAN
FIFTH ARMORED DIVISION WHICH HAS THE MISSION OF DEFENDING
THE NORTHERN DEFENSES OF JORDAN. THESE DISCUSSIONS

HAD NOT SERIOUSLY BEEN PURSUED IN ANY DETAIL. NO SYRIAN FORCES
WILL BE STATIONED IN JORDAN. IN ADDITION, THE
JORDANIANS WOULD AVOID ANY COMMITMENT TO BECOME INVOLVED
IN ANY CONFLICT UNLESS ATTACKED. THIS PARTICULARLY
RELATED TO A WAR IN WHICH SYRIA MIGHT BE THE
BATTLEFIELD. UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES RIFAI INSISTED
THAT JORDAN WOULD BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT BECOMING
INVOLVED RECOGNIZING THAT THEY HAD A GREAT DEAL TO
LOSE AND NOT VERY MUCH TO GAIN FROM RUSHING INTO
BATTLE AGAINST THE ISRAELIS.

7. FURTHER, ASAD SEEMED TO HAVE DEVELOPED A HEALTHIER APPRECIATION OF THE MILITARY TERRAIN OF THE
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PAGE 02 AMMAN 03929 02 OF 03 141605Z

JORDAN VALLEY AND THE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT CHARACTERISTICS IT OFFERED FOR WAR FIGHTING. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD, WHILE IN 1973 HE AND SADAT WERE ON THE PHONE EVERY FEW MINUTES ASKING FOR JORDANIAN HELP, NOW THAT HE HAS SEEN THE VALLEY HE KNOWS THAT ANYBODY WHO TRIES TO CROSS THE RIVER "WOULD GET NECK BROKEN." SIMILARLY, RIFAI SAID ASAD HAD DEVELOPED A HEALTHIER APPRECIATION OF THE STRENGTH OF JORDAN'S DEFENSIVE POSITION OF THE HEIGHTS OVERLOOKING THE VALLEY.

8. ON NEGOTIATIONS, ASAD, ACCORDING TO RIFAI, IS RESIGNED TO EGYPT TAKING ANOTHER STEP ON THE SINAI. THERE IS NOTHING HE CAN DO TO PREVENT IT AND HE SEEMS REALISTICALLY PREPARED TO ACQUIESCE IN WHATEVER MIGHT DEVELOP IN THAT AREA. HE DEEPLY WANTS SOMETHING ON THE GOLAN. HE ARGUES STRONGLY AGAINST ACCEPTING A FEW KILOMETERS IN THE SOUTH. HE CLAIMS IT WOULD COST HIM MORE MONEY TO REORIENT HIS MILIARY DEFENSIVE POSITION THAN THE RETURN OF THE TERRITORY WOULD BE WORTH TO HIM. THE SYRIAN POSITION STILL IS THAT THE DISENGAGEMENT MUST TAKE PLACE ALL ALONG THE GOLAN TO A DEPTH TO BE NEGOTIATED.

9. SYRIANS COMMENTED AT LENGTH ON THEIR DISPUTE WITH IRAQ. RIFAI SAYS THE FEELING IS DEEP AND BITTER. SYRIANS CLAIM THEY HAVE ONLY TURNED ON THE EUPHRATES WATER FOR A MONTH. THE NEXT PROBLEM WILL ARISE WHEN THE OIL AGREEMENT WITH IRAQ RUNS OUT, RIFAI BELIEVES NEXT MONTH. SYRIANS BADLY NEED THE OIL AND WILL WANT TO NEGOTIATE A NEW AGREEMENT ALSO FOR DELIVERY OF OIL TO SYRIA FROM IRAQ AT CONCESSIONAL PRICES. RIFAI SAYS IT IS HARD TO SEE ANY END TO THIS DISPUTE IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

9. ON THE PALESTINIANS, ASAD WAS APPARENTLY OPEN AND FRANK WITH JORDANIANS. HE SAID HE HAD TOLD ARAFAT THAT HE WOULD STILL HAVE SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR A STATE IN THE WEST BANK, BUT ONLY IF ARAFAT WOULD TAKE A STRONG HAND WITH ALL OF THE PLO GROUPS AND PULL THEM INTO LINE. SYRIA COULD DO NOTHING FOR HIM IF THAT DID NOT HAPPEN. ASAD SAID HE HAS ALSO INSISTED
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PAGE 03 AMMAN 03929 02 OF 03 141605Z

THAT ANY FUTURE STATE IN THE WEST BANK WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE TO HAVE A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JORDAN. RIFAI SAID THAT ACCORDING TO ASAD, ARAFAT HAD VERY MUCH AGREED WITH THIS ASSESSMENT AND WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THAT REALITY. RIFAI FEELS THAT ASAD WAS HONEST AND FRANK WITH THEM ON THE PLO AND HIS SUPPORT FOR THE ORGANIZATION'S QUARREL WITH JORDAN AND KING HUSSEIN.

10. IN DISCUSSING LEBANON, ASAD AND KHADDAM MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WOULD BE VERY DISTURBED IF THE PRESENT NEAR STATE OF ANARCHY CONTINUES. THEY HOPE FOR AN EARLY FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT BY KARAMI; THEY STRONGLY SUPPORT PRESIDENT FRANGIE; BUT THEY WOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT A MILITARY GOVERNMENT

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PAGE 01 AMMAN 03929 03 OF 03 141606Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4829

S E C R E T FINAL SECTION OF 3 AMMAN 3929

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

OR EVEN A MILITARY COUP SHOULD BRING ABOUT SOME ORDER AND STABILITY OUT OF THE CHAOS. THEY ARE EMBITTERED ABOUT IRAQI AND LIBYAN MEDDLING. THEY CLAIM THAT NEITHER THE PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION NOR THE CHRISTIAN PARTIES ARE SIGNIFICANTLY AT FAULT FOR THE PRESENT UNSETTLED STATE OF AFFAIRS. IT IS THE OUTSIDERS WHO HAVE STIRRED IT UP. WHILE HERE, KHADDAM SUGGESTED IN RIFAI'S PRESENCE TO ASAD THAT HE GO BACK AGAIN TO LEBANON. ASAD INSISTED HE STAY AWAY IN ORDER NOT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF

ANY FURTHER SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONTROVERSY.

11. I ASKED RIFAI WHAT KHADDAN WOULD BE BRINGING TO WASHINGTON. RIFAI REPLIED THAT HE WOULD PROBABLY FOLLOW PRETTY MUCH THE SAME LINE HE HAD HERE BUT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF INDICATING ACQUIESCENCE IN AN EGYPTIAN NEXT STEP WHICH RIFAI SAID WAS HIS OWN CONCLUSION BASED ON WHAT SYRIANS HAD TO SAY RATHER THAN A FRANK ADMISSION ON THEIR PART.

12. I ASKED RIFAI WHAT WAS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JOINT HIGH COMMITTEE WHICH HAD DEVELOPED IN THE ASAD VISIT. HE SAID THAT IT HAS BEEN THE SYRIANS' DESIRE TO HAVE SOMETHING COME FROM THE VISIT. THERE ALREADY EXISTED SOME RATHER UNCOORDINATED COMMITTEES IN SUCH AREAS AS MILITARY COOPERATION, HEALTH
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PAGE 02 AMMAN 03929 03 OF 03 141606Z

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORTATION, ETC. AS A RESULT BOTH SIDES AGREED THAT THE CREATION OF A JOINT COMMISSION TO PULL TOGETHER THE ACTIVITIES OF ALL THESE BODIES WAS A GOOD IDEA AND COULD BE A USEFUL DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISIT. RIFAI ATTACHED THEREFORE NO UNUSUAL OR EXCEPTIONAL IMPORTANCE TO THIS STEP, RATHER PORTRAYING IT AS A NATURAL EVOLUTION OF THE IMPROVED JORDAN-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP AND AS AN OUTGROWTH OF THE NEED TO HAVE "SOMETHING" TO PUT FORWARD AS A RESULT OF THE TRIP.

13. RIFAI SAID MUCH OF THE ECONOMIC COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WOULD BE PURSUED IN SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE JOINT COMMISSION. HOWEVER SYRIANS HAD AGREED TO GO AHEAD WITH THE MAQARIN DAM AND HAD APPROVED US PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT. ON THIS POINT THEY ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT IF SIGNIFICANT US FUNDING WERE INVOLVED, A US FIRM MIGHT BE ASKED TO UNDERTAKE THE CONSTRUCTION AND THIS WAS AGREEABLE TO THEM. FURTHER GIVEN SYRIA'S GOOD WATER AND ELECTRICAL POSITION, SYRIANS AGREED THAT ALL OF THE WATER STORED AND ELECTRICITY PRODUCED BY THE NEW DAM COULD BE USED BY JORDAN.

14. AS I WAS LEAVING RIFAI MENTIONED BRIEFLY HIS THEORY THAT RABIN'S EXTENDED CONVERSTATIONS IN THE US WERE A HOPEFUL SIGN AND THE ISRAELI RADIO SEEMED TO BE PLAYING IT THAT WAY. HE SAID HE WANTED ME TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU CAN FEEL FREE TO USE ANY OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION ON THE SYRIAN ATTITUDES IN YOUR TALKS WITH RABIN WHICH YOU THOUGHT YOU FELT HELPFUL. HE CLEARLY WANTED YOU TO KNOW

THAT WHATEVER IS BEING SAID ABOUT MILITARY COMMANDS
AND JOINT COMMUNIQUE IN THE PRESS AND ELSEWHERE
HE HOPED THE ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE
HIS OWN ASSESSMENT IN ORDER TO AVOID AN EXAGGERATED
IMPRESSION OF WHAT HAD ACTUALLY HAPPENED.
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